

William Gregory Building  
400-02 King Street  
Alexandria  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-674

HABS  
VA  
7-ALEX  
139-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## WILLIAM GREGORY BUILDING

HABS  
VA  
7-ALEX

Location: 400-02 King Street, Alexandria, Virginia (southwest corner of King and Royal Streets) 139-

Present Owner: Demolished in 1968 by the Alexandria Redevelopment Housing Authority as part of an urban renewal project in the old commercial center of Alexandria.

Statement of Significance: This double building was built by a prosperous Alexandria merchant who was also a veteran of the War of 1812. While the building is decked in neon and latter-day advertisements, its fine detailing recalls the finest of Alexandria's Federal style. It was one of two buildings associated with William Gregory on this block; see HABS report on the adjoining 404-06 King Street (VA-690).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

## 1. Date of erection: 1829

By February, 1829, William Gregory had acquired a three-fourths interest in a lot on this corner. On that date he and Presley Jacobs (see HABS report on Jacobs-Miner House at 113 S. Royal Street, VA-673), the owner of the remaining one-fourth interest, executed a deed of partition (Alexandria Deed Book R-2, p. 244). The corner, with a frontage of 37½ feet on King Street and 48 feet on Royal Street, was allotted to Gregory; Jacobs was given the remaining 14 feet on King Street, running south from King 48 feet. The deed provided that a well be dug, and that a "necessary" be built for the use of both properties. The necessary was to have three "apartments," two for Gregory and one for Jacobs. Alexandria Land and Personal Property Tax Assessment records, prepared in the spring of each year, show that work was under way in the spring of 1829; Gregory's property is assessed at \$3,000, with a notation "building" (Ward III, 1829, p. 3). The building was completed by the spring of 1830, the valuation being increased to \$8,000 (Ward III, 1830, p. 2).

## 2. Architect: Unknown

3. Original and subsequent owners: William Gregory was the original owner; subsequent owners unknown. Traditionally George Mason had an office on this site. Mason bought the quarter block (Lot 55) at the first auction of lots in July 1749. Mason may have had an office somewhere on this half acre (Lot 55), when he was serving as a Trustee of the town. This is one of those "traditions" it is impossible to prove or disprove--at least from the information now available.

Mason sold the quarter block to David Young the elder in 1762. After Young's death, his son, also David Young, subdivided the lot. On 13 March, 1787 (Alexandria Deed Book (Hustings) C, p. 71), conveyed to John Weathers Harper for £ 200:

"a certain corner lot of ground...Beginning at the house of Thomas Conn on King Street" and extending East on King 51 feet 6 inches to Royal Street; then south 47 feet on Royal Street to the house of the said David Young; then west 51 feet 6 inches parallel with King Street; then 47 feet north to King Street and the beginning, with "all the premises and appurtenances in fee."

This John Weathers Harper is not the sea captain John Harper, who was in Alexandria prior to the Revolutionary War, and apparently the two John Harpers are not related.

"All premises and appurtenances" conveyed in the 1787 deed may (or may not) have included a building or buildings erected by George Mason. A Mutual Assurance Company of Virginia fire insurance policy of 1798 covering the building adjoining to the south on Royal Street refers to the "wooden house of John Harper on the north." When this policy was renewed in 1805, the reference is to "John Harper's one-story wooden building to the north." Renewals in 1815 and 1823 continue to refer to Harper's building as "one-story wooden." (Photostats of the original insurance policies, Patton's reference numbers 54-A through 54-D, are in the Alexandria Library.)

A deed of trust executed by John Weathers Harper on 29 April, 1801 (Alexandria Deed Book A (Circuit Court of the District of Columbia for the County of Alexandria) p. 276) refers to the buildings then on the lot as:

...the House at the Southwest corner of King and Royal streets now in the possession of Samuel Adams together with the ground on which the said Dwelling House is situated. Also the adjoining

house on King street leased to Washington and Luke now subdivided into two Tenements and occupied by Adam Lynn and Edward Dawes...with all other buildings and ways, yards, streets, lanes, allies..

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The first owner of this building was the father of Mary Gregory Powell, author of The History of Old Alexandria, Virginia. She provides the following sketch of her father:

William Gregory 3rd was the eldest son of William Gregory 2nd of Kilmarnock, Scotland, and was born there the 3rd of March, 1789.

In 1807, at the age of eighteen, he came to Alexandria as a clerk for Robert McCrea, a Scottish merchant doing business on King street. Here he remained until 1813, when he became a partner of Mr. McCrea, and finally in 1827 succeeded him in the dry goods business. They imported Scotch, English and French goods, bringing from the factory of Gregory, Thomson and Co. carpets and other woolen goods. Some of these carpets were still in use in 1870.

In 1830 William Gregory brought over his brother Alexander, who remained with him until the latter's death in 1835. His brother, Peter Gregory, then came, but died within a few months at the age of nineteen years.

In 1814 William Gregory enlisted in the war then going on, and went with the Alexandria Blues, under Captain McKnight, to the White House on the Potomac below Mount Vernon. He participated in the battle fought there where two of his Alexandria friends were killed. He was the last survivor at Alexandria of this, General Washington's old company, at the time of his death in 1875. He did not live to receive a pension, but it was granted his widow a year after his death.

William Gregory amassed a comfortable fortune and retired from mercantile life in 1847. He had succeeded his father in the woolen factory at Kilmarnock, from which he also retired in 1847, with the idea of becoming a gentleman farmer in Fairfax County, Virginia. He was, however, at this time elected president of the Alexandria branch of the Farmers' Bank of Virginia, a position he retained until the bank closed in 1866.

He never accepted any office in the gift of the people, but was always recognized as a man of fine business judgment and strict integrity, on whose name there had never rested a blemish. He was a devoted husband, an indulgent father, and was most generous to his brothers

and sisters, and he was charitable to all. His education had been at the grammar schools of Kilmarnock, Scotland, and to the day of his death he found pleasure in reading the Greek and Latin classics.

Few in this day lead as he did such a lengthened term of life with the enjoyment of mind and body. To the last his complexion retained the freshness of youth. ...

William Gregory was twice married; first to Margaret, daughter of William Bartleman, a merchant of Alexandria, and second to Mary, the daughter of Captain Long of the Island of Nantucket, Massachusetts. By each wife he had five children.

He died July 13th, 1875, in the eighty-seventh year of his age.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: Deed records as cited; Mutual Assurance Company of Virginia Insurance policy records at the Alexandria Public Library.
2. Secondary and published sources: Powell, Mary G. History of Old Alexandria, Virginia (Richmond: William Byrd Press, 1928).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

The double building exhibits fine brickwork and an unusual surviving hipped roof. When new, it likely housed commercial functions on the first floor and residential functions on the upper floors.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Three stories, four bays x four bays. In 1829, when the building was constructed, the lot measured 37½ feet on King by 48 feet on Royal. There is a one-story rear addition.
2. Wall construction, finish and color: Brick, Flemish bond
3. Chimneys: Two interior end chimneys
4. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The shop fronts were drastically altered in the 20th century.

- b. Windows and shutters: Splayed brick lintels with key-stones.

5. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Hipped
- b. Cornice, eaves: The modillioned cornice is made up of projecting bricks.

C. Description of Interior:

Double-unit plan.

D. Site:

The corner building faces northward along the south side of King Street.

Prepared by Mrs. Hugh B. Cox of  
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Edited by  
Antoinette J. Lee  
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken in 1968 to document the commercial and residential buildings of downtown Alexandria which were to be demolished in an urban renewal project. The project was cosponsored by the Historic Alexandria Foundation and the Historic American Buildings Survey. Mrs. Hugh B. Cox was the historian and George Eisenman supplied the photographs. The material was edited and updated in 1975 by Antoinette J. Lee, working on contract for HABS.